THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (d) Discussions on demarcation of the boundary in Sir Creek area have been taking place since 1969. On 22-23 December 2006, technical level talks on Sir Creek led by Hydrographers of India and Pakistan were held in Rawalpindi to decide the coordinates for joint survey of the Sir Creek and adjoining areas without prejudice to the positions of the two countries, as well as to hold discussions simultaneously on the maritime boundary. At this meeting, the two sides worked out the technical details of the joint survey. It was agreed to commence the joint survey from 15th January 2007. It was also agreed to verify the outermost points of coastlines of both countries during the joint survey with regard to the equidistance method. The joint survey began on January 15, 2007 as agreed by both sides.

Safety of Indians in Afghanistan

1843. SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI:
SHRI AMAR SINGH:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Indians residing in Afghanistan and the number of persons killed during the last year;

(b) whether it is a fact that Indians in Afghanistan are told to stay away from Southern Afghanistan and if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) Government's reaction towards the safety of Indians in Afghanistan?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) There are approximately 3,500 Indian nationals residing in Afghanistan. Two Indian nationals were killed in Afghanistan last year. In February 2006, Shri Bharath Kumar, working for a US based company, was killed in a land mine blast. In April 2006, an Indian engineer, Shri K Suryanarayan, working with a Bahrain based firm was taken hostage and killed by suspected Taliban elements in Ghazni province of Afghanistan.

(b) No.

(c) Our Mission/Posts in Afghanistan issue regular security advisories and updates for the benefit of Indians working in Afghanistan. Indian workers are urged to register themselves with the Indian Embassy or any of the

Consulates. They have been instructed to take adequate security measures and inform their employers and the Embassy/Posts in case they perceive any security threat. Our Embassy in Kabul has also held meetings with representatives of Indian companies to emphasise the need for observing security precautions. Government of India are in constant touch with the Government of Afghanistan, which has assured that it will take all the steps necessary to provide security to Indians in Afghanistan.

Boundary dispute with Pakistan

1844. SHRI AMAR SINGH:
SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether special representatives of India and China recently met in the Capital and held discussion on the boundary dispute between India and Pakistan; and

(b) if so, the details thereof including the outcome of the discussion?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) The ninth round of talk between the Special Representatives of India and China was held in New Delhi from January 16 to 18, 2007, to explore from the political perspective of the overall bilateral relationship, the framework for the settlement of India-China Boundary Question. Both sides agreed to hold the next round of talks between the Special Representatives at a mutually convenient time which will be decided through the diplomatic channel.

Ethnic conflict in Nepal

1845. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:
SHRI KAMAL AKHTAR:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken cognizance of the ethnic conflict in the Terai region of Nepal;

(b) whether victims of the ethnic conflict are crossing over into India; il so, the details thereof;